



## Wedding

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Wedding's not an ugly manner,  
Wedding's a beautiful and memorable instance;  
Wedding's an example cause;  
All I remembers' a prediction;  
All I experience's a sudden exhibition;  
Dull and stupid and carelessly,  
Victimizing and saddening and desolate;  
Abandoning and lonely and timidly,  
Gloomy and down-hearted and fallen;  
Discouraging and demoralizing and uninviting;  
Hating and sickening and comfortless;  
Losing strength and confidence;  
I knew nothing to embrace sweet fully;  
So terribly dumb struck, sitting wholly  
No utterly words heard, disqualifying totally;  
No friends a happy guest altogether,  
No purpose a welcoming action unconditionally;  
Sudden struck a blame institute,  
All I favors' a damn good shutting and securing.

Wedding's not an ugly manner,  
Wedding's a beautiful and memorable instance;  
Wedding's an example cause;  
No activity's a great concern and uncertain;  
Hiding all I can know of,  
Smelling fishy and too scared to handle;  
What a wedding life I am too?  
All I expose is to keep my little strength,  
Alive and shining and afresh;  
Enclosing that four -corned room dim and shadily;  
Hoping for a new brighter tomorrow,  
So stupid and so solid I am too;  
All I knew is little, less and nothing,  
All I feel is 'just let it go and let it ease'  
All I do is struck inside out, 'm a stranger  
Unsettle and upset and dreamy.

Wedding's not an ugly manner,  
Wedding's a beautiful and memorable instance;  
Wedding's an example cause;  
Enfolding all those tasks swiping,  
Washing and cooking and gathering,  
And holding and folding and wrapping,  
And judging and tasking and idle ting and  
Encouraging and promising and be scarily natural;  
Oh! What a manner?  
Oh! How you judge this wedding day?  
All I remember is too afraid to tell,  
All I experience is too uncomfortable to stand with;  
Just passing day, with all those sweet little clothes on;  
How happy and courageous I am?  
Being an owner to few elementary clothes,  
Striking not a material grieving and possession;  
Arching not for an error instances;  
All I emancipate is a liberal way. ■

## OF MALE AGGRESSION AND SUPPRESSED VOICES: POETICS OF VIOLENCE IN THE POETRY OF MANIPURI WOMEN AUTHORS

By- *Linthoingambi Thangjam*

The northeast region of India is now comprised of eight states namely Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Sikkim. All these states except Sikkim had hitherto been independent until their annexation into British India in the 19th Century. Sikkim became a part of the Indian Union in May, 1975. The total population of all the eight northeast states is 3.1 percent of the total population of India, as per the 2011 Census.

According to the 2011 Census, the population of Manipur is approximately 2.8 million. Three dominant tribes inhabit in the state of Manipur namely the Nagas, the Kukis, and the Meiteis. The Meiteis are the dominant community having their own language and script. However, the archaic script, 'Meitei Mayek' in local parlance, came to be replaced by the Bengali script, during the reign of King Pamheiba (1709-1748AD). The 'Puya Meitihaba' or the burning of ancient Manipuri scriptures in 1729 during the time of King Pamheiba is of great significance in the history of Manipur and its literature because the reading and writing in the local script was obliterated.

Manipur was a princely state till its invasion by the British at the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891, and the kingdom got its independence in 1947. It had merged into India during the reign of King Bodhchandra Singh (1905-1955), after signing the Merger Agreement of 12th September 1949 in Shillong. In the later centuries, a unique syncretisation between Hindu culture and the traditional culture and customs ensued. Adoption of Hinduism (Vaishnavism to be precise) and Hindu ways separated the valley from the hills. Lines drawn on religion, ethnicity, and culture put Manipur in a trajectory of dangerous competitive ethno-nationalisms. No wonder that the state still faces the challenges of insurgency, ethnic rivalries, political unrest, corruption, and human rights violations. Manipur which is a part of the northeast region is one of the most violence affected states due to multiple reasons. Political unrest in the state includes frequent bandhs, general strikes, total shutdowns, boycotting general elections, national holidays and celebrations, economic blockades on the two national highways which are the only life-lines for the landlocked state, etc. Such acts of disruption by various groups and organizations throw the state out of gear affecting peace and prosperity in the state. Human rights violations in the state include extrajudicial killings, fake encounters, sexual harassment, etc. The unrest in Manipur is summed up by Bethany Lacinia, in her article 'The Problem of Political Stability in Northeast India: Local Ethnic Autocracy and the Rule of Law', as, 'The rules of engagement for the security forces and their alleged assaults on the local population have become a major point of political contention in Manipur' [Bethany, November/December 2009: 998-1020].

The socio-political unrest in the state has created extraordinary circumstances for the women in Manipur. They constantly face suppression in many forms not only from the male members of their families, but also from the state machinery. This situation is reaffirmed by Salam Irene [2014: 4] in her book, *Women of Manipur: An Alternative Perspective*, as, 'While the subjugation is rooted in patriarchy it is sanctified by custom and reinforced by the state'. In a patriarchal society of an insurgency afflicted state like Manipur, where the voices of the women are suppressed due to fear of male aggression, and threat from insurgent groups, it becomes important to be able to delve into the minds of the Manipuri women writers to uncover the suppressed voices. Salam Irene's observation that the many women victims of violence

in Manipur 'prefer to remain silent for fear of repercussions in the form of social ostracism, or from shame, and a plethora of complex emotions and feelings' [Ibid., 3], holds true. It is assumed that women in traditional societies in the northeast enjoy greater freedom compared to other societies in India. But, if we look into these societies as autoethnographers, this notion is a misconception not only from the politico-historical perspective, but also from anthropological and cultural viewpoints. In the essay, 'The Manipuri Women and Changing World', in the book 'North East India: Selected Regional Issues' edited by Amar Yumnam, Vijayakshmi Bara and Seromena Asem find that in most cultural and religious traditions, women play an indispensable role not only as transmitters but also 'as creators and custodians of culture', and 'this relationship between gender and culture is used as a basis for justifying violations of women's human rights' [Yumnam, ed., 2011: 127-128]. In a traditional Manipuri family, both men and women have equal responsibilities as they are required on the paddy fields in activities such as tilling, sowing, and harvesting. Both men and women have equal responsibilities in rites and rituals performed round the year. While the male shaman (high priest) called 'Maiba' functions as a healer or medicine-man, his female counterpart called 'Maibi' (high priestess) has very significant role to play right from childbirth to fortune telling. However, women are cast aside in the matters of the state in the enterprise of reading and writing. Reading and writing, which was solely a royal court's affair, and handled by the 'Maiba Loishang' (The House of Scholars), was a forbidden place for women.

The status of women further took a back-seat after Hinduism was adopted as the state religion. Many freedoms enjoyed by women in pre-Hinduism period were soon to change after the advent of this religion. In the 18th Century, Vaishnavism got firmly rooted in a Manipuri's religious and cultural life. This meant that Manipuris were introduced to new cultural and societal norms which were alien to them. New norms of cooking, feeding, visiting a temple, dress codes, etc. were introduced to Manipuri women. The segregation and widening disparity between the genders could be seen right from the 18th Century in which Indic value systems such as eating after the husband has eaten, or equating a husband with a god or the concept of a chaste wife and *sati* were popularised and promulgated. Talking about gender disparity, Brara and Asem opine that, 'Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which led to domination over and discrimination against women by men.' [Ibid.]. Girls' education in Manipur came to be accepted by society and encouraged only roughly around the first half of the 20th Century. Tamphasana School, established in 1935, is considered the first all girls high school which introduced Western education to girl students. Amongst the first women to pass the Matriculation examination in 1939 were Sarojini, Satyabati, Radhe, Tamubi, M. K. Binodini, Thoibi Devi, etc. Feminine consciousness developed with growing awareness brought by Western education, and the educated women started writing about their plight in a patriarchal society. Despite the kinds of responsibilities placed on women in the Manipuri household, and the moral conventions which a woman is expected to abide by, women have come out of that secluded corner and made commendable contributions to the world of Manipuri Literature. Manipuri literary space before independence in 1947 had been largely male-dominated. The

involvement and recognition of women writers in Manipuri Literature began mostly after the end of the Second World War (1939-45). The dearth in the number of women writers before the war, or even meagre percentage after is explained by the prevalent conventional rules and restrictions placed by Manipuri society on women, and Western education being strictly discouraged by 'amang-asheng' practices. The works of the three most important women figures, considered to be the pioneers, in Manipuri Literature called the 'yotshabi makhong ahum' (the three legs of a tripod) namely Takhellambam Thoibi Devi, Khaidem Pramodini Devi and M.K. Binodini Devi, are all dated after the war. Dr. S. Shantibala Devi and Dr. W. Kumari Chanu [2015: 19] in their book, 'Woman Activism in Contemporary Manipuri Literature', observed that: Literature in Manipur during the 1960s tends to depict idealistic and romantic aspects of woman's lives which gradually evolved to express in the following decades tensions underlying societal norms in matrimonial alliances and individual choices.

Though there is a scanty literary product following the Great War, women authors quickly tried to contextualize their issues and problems. Shantibala and Kumari further add that the main themes of the new woman writers were, 'the fear and anxieties of the times, corruption in economic and political lives, the widening gap in relationships and the unrelenting dilemma of the poor' [Ibid.]. Most of the Manipuri women writers were influenced by their personal experiences, and from the witness of day to day happenings. While there have been countless critical works done on Manipuri male poets like Anganghal, Chaoba and Kamal, critical work done on Manipuri women poets and authors is very limited. One obvious reason could be the late entry of women writers into the Manipuri literary sphere. This paper will focus on selected poems of the Manipuri women authors. Poetry was the first literary genre that Manipuri women writers experimented with. The first Manipuri women poets to address the issue of women were Khwairakpam Anandini, Laishram Ongbi Ibempishak, Sanjenbam Bhanumati, etc. The year 1967 saw the first published poetry collection by a woman poet in Manipuri Literature, Khwairakpam Anandini, called 'Sajbugi Leirang' (Flowers of April). This period was soon to be followed by a generation of writers such as Kshetrimayum Subadani, Moirangthem Borkanya, Lairenlakpam Ibemhal, Arambam Ongbi Memchoubi, etc.

Before we get further into the focus of this paper, we need to understand what violence is, and the different forms of violence that the women in Manipur particularly face in the state. World Health Organisation (WHO) defines violence as 'the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.' The same voice is echoed by many critics. Out of the many, Joseph S. Roucek's observation in the article, 'Sociological Elements of a Theory of Terror and Violence', is interesting. He observed, 'On the domestic front, the psychological-terror methods, coupled with intimidation, aim to force the terror object to behave in a manner most favourable for the subject' [Roucek, Apr., 1962: 165-172]. Some of the common types of violence faced by Manipuri women include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, cultural, etc. Khwairakpam Anandini, in her poem 'Lei Pareng' / 'Garland' from her collection 'Sajbugi Leirang', seeks blessings offered the simple garland that she had woven herself

[Memchoubi and Chanu, eds., 2003: 112]. The addressee is silent in the poem, but it is clear that it is one who is above her. The speaker humbles herself as she conveys how she could only get the flowers that had fallen at the legs of the plants after having ended their blooming journey. The humbled speaker, throughout the poem, repeatedly presents herself as a weak, innocent and submissive woman. Had it been a male poet/speaker, would he have spoken from that humbled position? Or is it only because the idea that a woman has to stay subservient having internalized in the woman poet/speaker portrays herself as such?

*Even if my garland lacks perfection of beauty*  
*Considering me unskilled*  
*Happily, and heartily*  
Please accept this garland of mine, without any hesitance. Longjam Ongbi Ibempishak in her poem 'Kadaidano Achumba: Mami Shamlaba Khonjeli' / 'Where Lies the Truth: A Faint Voice', expresses a feeling of being deceived and lost hope in mankind [Memchoubi and Ibemhal, Thumaonjam Chanu, 2003: 120]. The speaker in the poem is 'a faint voice', and speaks for everyone who feels defeated by the reality of circumstances around her. She is referring to the situation that is the state today: corruption, disputes, political unrest and so on. It is a world where human greed has taken over, and the question arises as who is to judge right from wrong.

*Whom to ask*  
*Where to seek,*  
*In the battle for survival*  
*Who is truthful?*  
*Who is wrong?*  
Moirangthem Borkanya, in 'Fragments of Earthen Pots' / 'Chaphu Mchet' [Ibid., ] describes the woe of tale of earthen pots that lie scattered on a graveyard, expressing the frequency of deaths taking place every day and what has become a norm in the state of Manipur. With acts like AFSPA that has been in force in the state for so many years, human life is unpredictable, affecting the lives of the common people. The value of human life has become worthless as death can take one at any time of the day. Incidences of fake encounters are a daily highlight in the newspapers. Borkanya, in her poem, expresses her sad disappointment at the situation in the state. She personifies the fragments of earthen pots who converse with one another, lamenting how they had only wished to serve as 'Ishaiu' (earthen pot for storing and cooling water), 'To quench / The thirsty and the parched'. But instead they ended being used at funerals, with no one to understand their lament except the graveyard itself.

Fragments of earthen pots lie scattered on a graveyard  
Littered is so the graveyard.  
After the passing of a few days  
Another pot comes to mingle at the same graveyard.  
Angom Sarita [2010: 3] in her poem, 'Keinya' / 'Bride', from her collection 'Mee Amasung Shaa', wrote how the woman is adored like a goddess on her wedding day, but ironically 'remain as a wretched mute', and she can only silently accept her role as a wife and a mother all her life. Despite the perception that women in Manipur enjoy greater freedom compared to women in other states of India, they still face subjugation enforced by a certain set of conventions ordained by the Manipuri society. The Manipuri woman do not have any say in their wants household and dislikes, from any decision making of the right up to choosing the man that she marries. When she is married, she goes from being a possession of the male members of her maternal home, to the husband's. And to the married Manipuri woman, her husband and her children becomes her everything. Tying.

(... To be contd.)

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